



More Than Just Students: Personal Information Needs of ESL Community College Students

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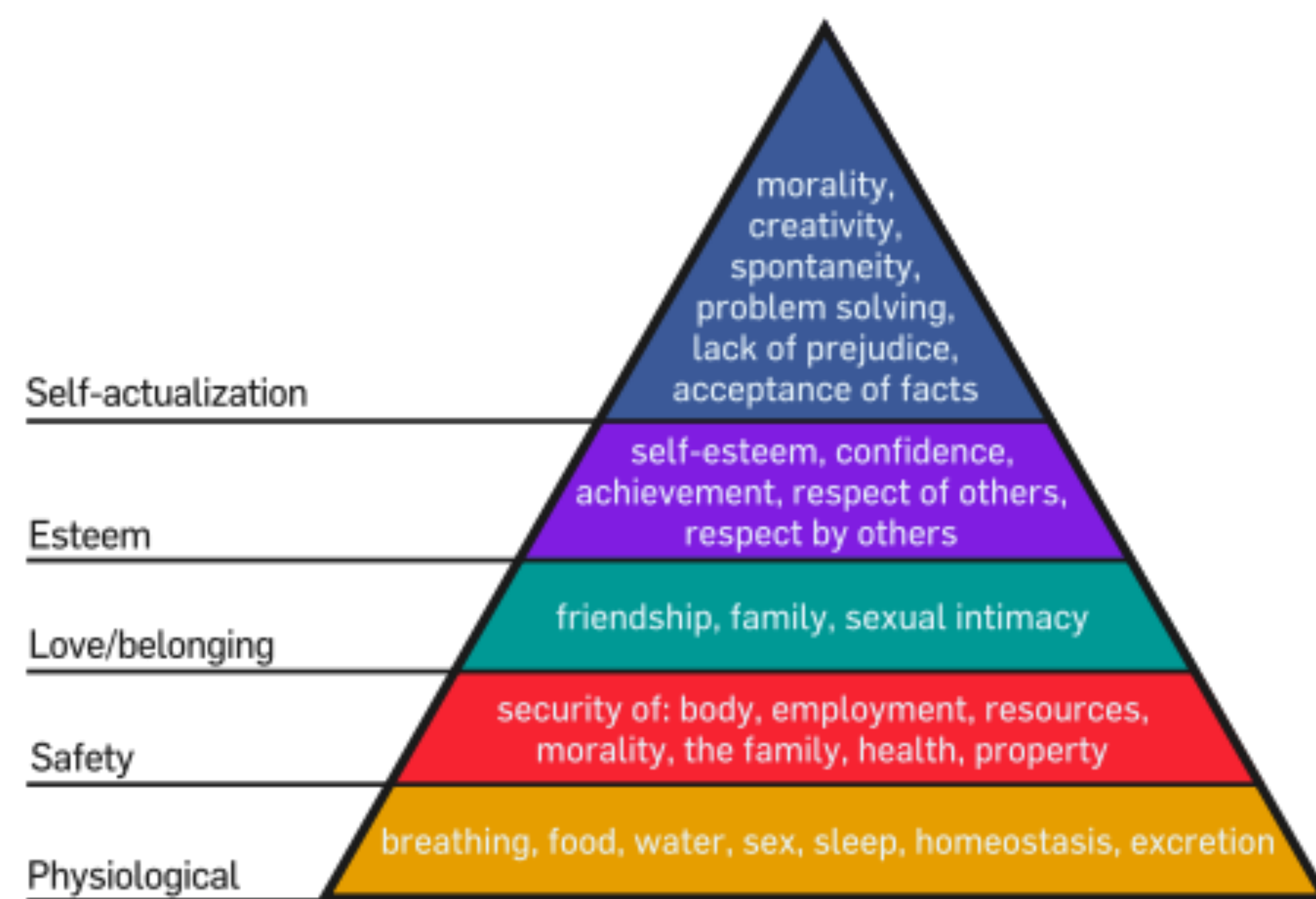
ABSTRACT

Over a million international students attended U.S. colleges and universities in the 2015-2016 academic year, international student enrollment has risen steadily over the past decade, and the majority of these students come from countries where English is not the primary language (Institute for International Education, 2016). Furthermore, the Pew Research Center reports that “future immigrants and their children will account for 88% of the U.S. population increase between 2016 and 2065” (as cited in Ramakrishnan, Barker, Vervoordt, & Zhang, 2017, p. 1).

Existing studies of international and English as a second language (ESL) students have focused mainly on their academic information needs, while relatively few have considered information needs related to their personal lives. However, as suggested by Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, it can be difficult for a person to focus on learning and self-actualization when safety and belonging needs are not being met (as cited in Ramakrishnan, Barker, Vervoordt, & Zhang, 2017).

Furthermore, academic level may be a predictor of information behavior (Alzougool, Chang, Gomes, & Berry, 2013; Sin & Kim, 2013; Yi, 2007), yet few studies address the information behavior of ESL students attending community colleges.

Thus, this study seeks to understand the information behavior of ESL community college students and to explore how academic libraries can develop holistic strategies for meeting their information needs not just as students, but as whole persons.



Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Image source: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/hide-and-seek/201205/our-hierarchy-needs>

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are ESL community college students' information needs in their personal lives?
2. What information sources do they use to meet these needs?
3. What challenges do they face in meeting these needs?
4. What strategies can community college libraries employ to help ESL students meet these needs?

METHODS

This will be a two-phase exploratory study using a mixed methods approach. Potential participants will be identified by contacting the ESL and international student offices of the 16 Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) campuses. Participants will be recruited via email, ESL instructors sharing information about the study, posting links on campus Facebook pages, and posting flyers around campus.

The first phase will collect quantitative data about demographics and information behavior via multiple-choice survey available online and in print. Data will be analyzed to identify correlations and statistically significant results using SPSS.

The second phase will collect qualitative data about information behavior and desired library resources and services via focus groups with ESL students on each of the campuses.

EARLY QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

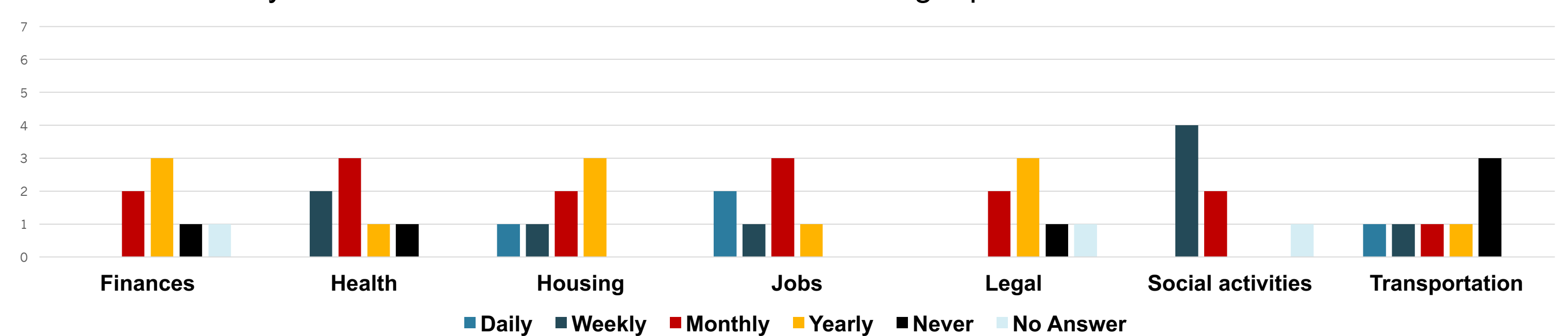
A pilot test with 7 ESL community college students was conducted to refine the survey questions. Students recommended limiting the survey to 10 questions to increase participation.

For demographic information, they suggested checkboxes for age, gender, years in college, and years in the U.S. to overcome language barriers in having to write out answers. Students also recommended providing ranges for age, years in college, and years in the U.S. for a sense of increased anonymity. This resulted in the following questions:

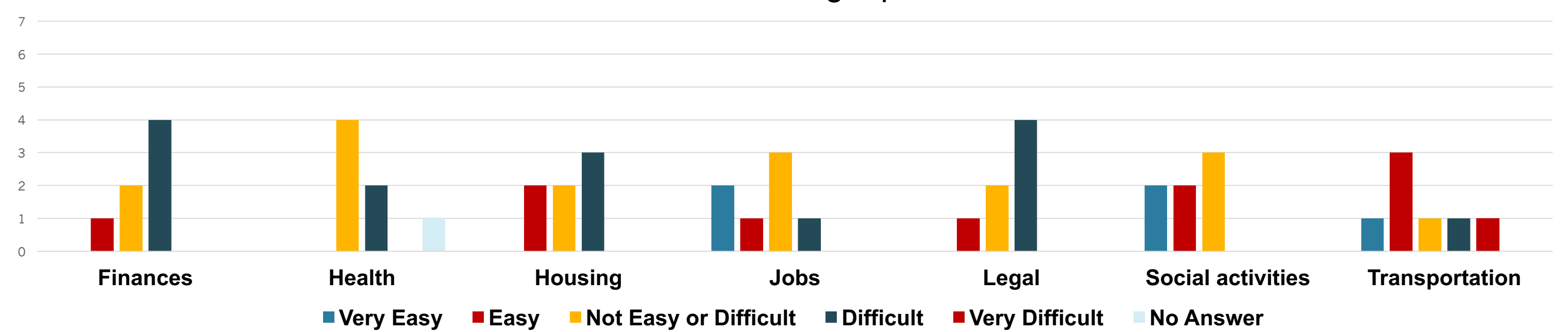
1. What is your age? Choices: 19 or younger, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35 or older
2. What is your gender? Choices: female, male
3. How many years have you been in college? Choices: less than 1, 1-2, 2-3, 3-4, 4 or more
4. How many years have you lived in the United States? Choices: less than 1, 1-2, 2-3, 3-4, 4 or more
5. What is your native country? (open-ended)
6. What is your native language? (open-ended)

For information behavior questions, information needs (or topics) were selected from studies by Alzougool et al. (2013), Chung & Yoon (2015), Sin & Kim (2013), and Sin, Kim, Yang, Park, & Laugheed (2011), and the list was narrowed based on student recommendations to increase participation. This resulted in the following questions:

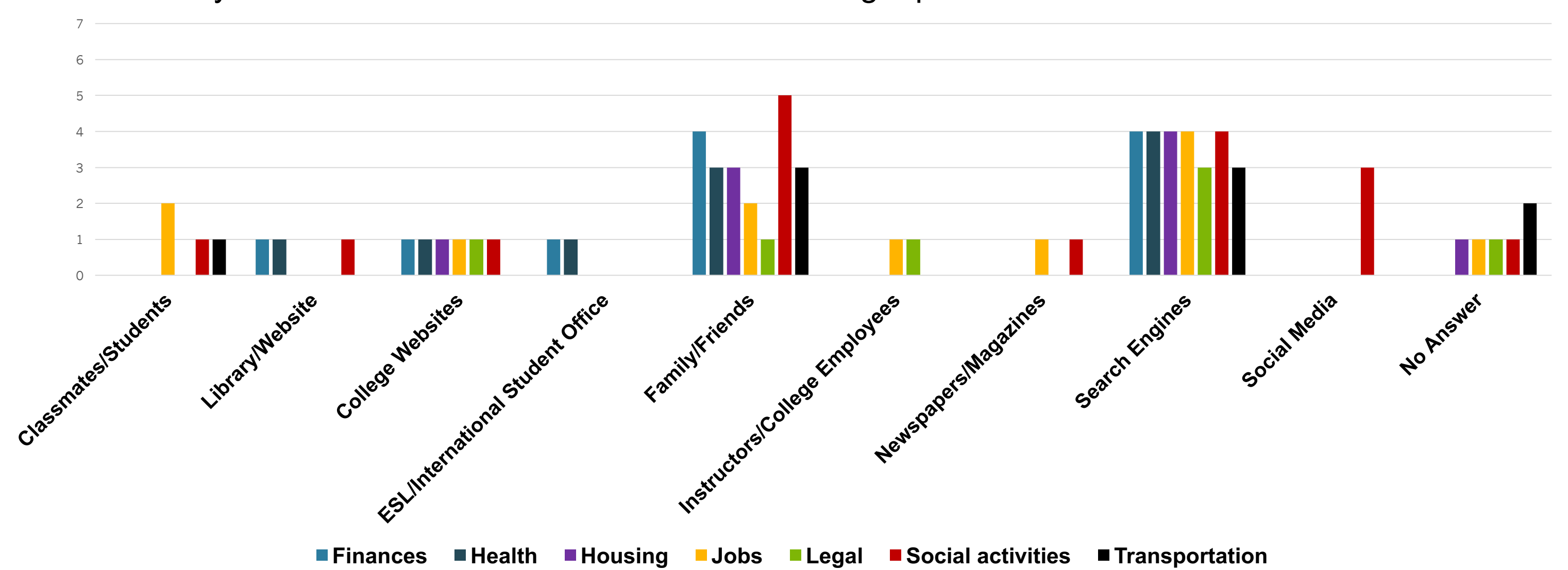
7. How often do you search for information about the following topics?



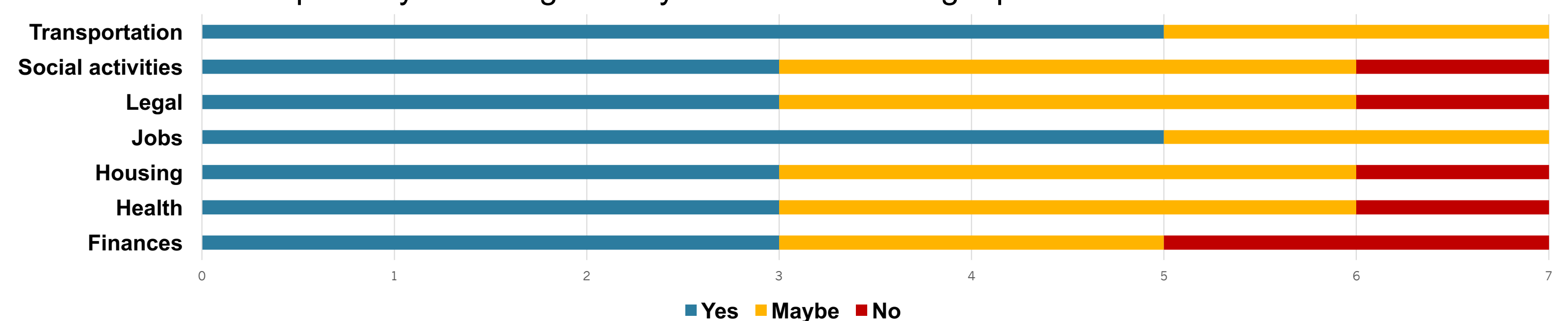
8. How difficult is it to find information about the following topics?



9. Where do you search for information about the following topics?



10. Would like help from your college library about the following topics?



EARLY QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

A conversation was held with an ESL colleague about ESL community college students' information behavior, and library resources and services that they might be interested in, to simulate a focus group interview. The colleague made the following suggestions:

- Include the library in ESL and international student orientations.
- Near the library entrance, place a rack with informational flyers about finances, health, housing, jobs, legal issues (e.g. visas, citizenship), social activities, and transportation (e.g. bus routes, travel to other cities).
- Many international students are also seeking family counseling about topics such as divorce and child custody, and it would be useful to include information about these topics in the flyer rack as well.
- Listening and speaking language skills are not only an academic information need, but also a personal life information need, especially in regards to slang and informal phrases.
- ESL students want opportunities to practice their listening and speaking skills with native English speakers. ESL students would likely be very interested in listening and speaking practice workshops at their college libraries (similar to sessions held at public libraries).

The 7 ESL students from the pilot test expressed excitement and appreciation for the opportunity to share their needs and opinions alongside their friends. To capitalize on this sense of community sharing, focus groups (rather than individual interviews) could be held on each of the 16 KCTCS campuses. While questions would be asked verbally, participants would be provided with a written copy of the questions as well to address multiple learning styles and overcome language barriers. ESL instructors would be invited to co-facilitate with the researcher to increase student comfort and to aid in communication.

Potential focus group questions would include the following:

- What types of information do you search for in your personal life? How often? Why?
- What information is hard for you to find? Why?
- Where do you search for personal life information? Why?
- What types of resources and services would you like the library to offer? How likely would you be to use these if they were offered? Why?



Image source: University of the Fraser Valley - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ufv/24106834800/>

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